

## "Let the Prophet's Voice Ring"

July 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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### READINGS

Ezekiel 2:1–5

2 Corinthians 12:2–10

Mark 6:1–13

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This weekend is a time for patriots. In our nation, unlike in many others, patriotism can take different forms. You may express your patriotism by proudly displaying the flag and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance hand over heart. Your neighbors may express their patriotism by burning their flag and chanting protests against our government in Washington D.C. I may express my patriotism by singing "God Bless America"; while the now infamous Reverend Jeremiah Wright shouts from the pulpit, "God Damn America!" As reprehensible as those words are to our ears, his right to utter them is essential to our freedom.

To the French philosopher Voltaire is often attributed the wonderful phrase in defense of freedom of speech, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Voltaire also wrote, "[It is] extremely cruel to persecute in this brief life those who do not think the way we do..." Freedom of speech is more than just a catch phrase in America; it is a sacred way of life. We believe in the presence of eternal Truth. We also believe that the only route to that Truth is free and respectful discourse among our citizens.

We are tragically aware of an alternative version of patriotism that rules in places in our world today. In North Korea, for example, patriotism means unquestioning support of the government of Kim Jong-il. Allegiance to the flag is not optional. We have also witnessed what patriotism means in modern Iran, both political support and religious acquiescence to authority of the Ayatollahs and the president they prop up. Although some protest was permitted in reaction to recent elections, it was the government which finally decided the extent to which they would be allowed to proceed. Those forms of patriotism we see as submission to tyranny.

My purpose today is not political but religious. I am not concerned with political leaders, either freely elected presidents or dictator; I am concerned with prophets. I have discovered, however, that the phrase "let freedom ring" is roughly equivalent to "let the prophet's voice ring." We will see in both our Old Testament lesson from Ezekiel and Jesus speaking in our Gospel, that the prophetic voice stands behind blessed freedom as citizens of a free nation.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

The answers to the world's problems are not always black and white; and, I might add, they are not always red, white and blue.

Talk about the importance of civility in discourse.